



GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Interim Guidance about Avian Influenza A (H5N1) for U.S. Citizens Living Abroad

U.S. citizens living abroad should be aware that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has upgraded its previous notice about avian influenza A (H5N1)—bird flu—in Vietnam and Thailand (see http://www.cdc.gov/travel/other/avian_flu_vietnam_2005.htm) from an **Outbreak Notice** to a **Travel Health Precaution**. During the upcoming Lunar New Year in Vietnam, increases are expected both in travel and in the preparation and consumption of poultry. Exposure to infected birds, which has been linked to the transmission of the H5N1 virus, may be more likely during the New Year holiday because of the popularity of traditional poultry dishes.

Travel Health Precautions outline specific measures for travelers to take before, during, and after travel (see below). A general notice for all travelers to areas affected by H5N1 can be found at http://www.cdc.gov/travel/other/avian_flu_asia_2005.htm. CDC has not recommended that the general public avoid travel to any of the countries affected by H5N1.

Current Situation

Outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza A (H5N1) among poultry are ongoing in several countries in Asia, including Thailand and Vietnam. Human cases also have been reported sporadically in Thailand and Vietnam. In September and October 2004, Thailand reported 5 human cases of H5N1 infection (with 4 deaths). Since the end of December, 10 human cases of H5N1 infection—9 fatal—have been officially reported by Vietnam. Field investigations so far have found little conclusive evidence of human-to-human transmission of the disease. However, one isolated instance of probable limited human-to-human transmission occurred in Thailand in September 2004.

Background: Avian Influenza A H5N1

H5N1 is a viral infection that usually affects wild birds but can infect and cause serious disease among poultry, such as chickens. While it is unusual for humans to get avian influenza virus infections directly from birds, human infections and outbreaks caused by certain avian influenza A viruses have been documented since 1997 (see <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/outbreaks/asia.htm>). In late 2003–04, new outbreaks of H5N1 among poultry were reported from several Asian countries. For details, see <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/outbreaks/asia.htm>.

Certain H5N1 infections in humans cause serious disease that is often fatal. In most cases, transmission of H5N1 to humans has been linked to exposure to infected birds, uncooked infected poultry, or contaminated surfaces. No vaccine is currently available to prevent avian influenza in humans.

CDC Recommendations

Surveillance & Travel: CDC continues to recommend the measures that were detailed in a health update on August 12, 2004 (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/professional/han081304.htm>). Because avian influenza viruses can change rapidly, the situation in South Asia is being monitored carefully. CDC remains in close

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communication with the World Health Organization (WHO) about the evolving avian influenza situation and has been assisting with laboratory testing for H5N1. CDC will continue to provide updates on its avian influenza website (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm>) and the Travelers' Health website (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel>). Information is also available on the WHO website (<http://www.who.int/en/>).

Precautions: The following recommendations are directed to embassies and U.S. citizens living abroad in areas where avian influenza cases among humans and poultry have been reported. These recommendations are based on experience to date and may be revised as more information becomes available. Embassies should recommend the following precautions to U.S. expatriates living in an area with avian influenza:

- To minimize the possibility of infection, observe precautions to safeguard your health. Specifically, travelers should avoid settings where avian influenza is most likely to be transmitted, such as bird markets and poultry yards. During the Lunar New Year celebration, chickens and ducks may frequently be present in homes and back yards, and holiday dishes containing poultry are served.
- As with other infectious illnesses, one of the most important preventive practices is careful and frequent handwashing. Cleaning your hands often, using either soap and water or waterless, alcohol-based hand rubs, removes potentially infectious materials from your skin and helps prevent disease transmission.
- CDC does not recommend the routine use of masks or other personal protective equipment while in public areas.

If you believe you might have been exposed to avian influenza, take the following precautions:

- Monitor your health for 14 days.
- If you become ill with fever, difficulty breathing, cough, or any illness during this period, consult a health-care provider. ***Before you visit a health-care setting, tell the provider about your symptoms and that you might have been exposed to avian influenza.***
- The U.S. embassy or consulate can also provide names and addresses of local physicians.
- Do not travel while sick, and limit your contact with others as much as possible to help prevent the spread of any infectious illness.

When preparing food:

- Separate raw meat from cooked or ready-to-eat foods. Do not use the same chopping board or the same knife for preparing raw meat and cooked or ready-to-eat foods.
- Do not handle either raw or cooked foods without washing your hands in between.
- Do not place cooked meat back on the same plate or surface it was on before it was cooked.
- All foods from poultry should be cooked thoroughly, including eggs. Egg yolks should not be runny or liquid. Because influenza viruses are destroyed by heat, the cooking temperature for poultry meat should reach 70°C (158° F).
- Wash egg shells in soapy water before handling and cooking, and wash your hands afterwards.
- Do not use raw or soft-boiled eggs in foods that will not be cooked.
- After handling raw poultry or eggs, wash your hands and all surfaces and utensils thoroughly with soap and water.

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- Do not eat uncooked or undercooked poultry or poultry products, including food with uncooked poultry blood.

For more information about avian influenza, see <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm> and http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/.

For information about safety and security for Americans living abroad, see <http://travel.state.gov/>.

For more information, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm>, or call the National Immunization Hotline at (800) 232-2522 (English), (800) 232-0233 (español), or (800) 243-7889 (TTY).